

*ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES
FOR THE EXTERIOR REHABILITATION OF
BUILDINGS IN ROCKVILLE'S
HISTORIC DISTRICTS*

DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

*Adopted
September 1977*

ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

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The Rockville Historic District Commission has determined that several aspects of architectural design have a significant impact on the character and value of the Historic Districts in Rockville. The following design review guidelines are based on existing design characteristics commonly observed in the Rockville Historic Districts and detailed in the preceding series of annotated drawings. Their development here is intended to serve as a basic description against which plans for rehabilitation and for new construction can be judged for harmony, compatibility, and appropriateness.

The intent of these guidelines is not to require particular architectural features or dictate architectural style. Rather, it is to identify a range of design options which will encourage development that is compatible with the existing character of the Rockville Historic Districts, and which will discourage the introduction of incompatible features. Contemporary designs and materials, used in a manner compatible with the visual character of the past that is being preserved, are not only permitted but encouraged. Economic feasibility and durability of proposed improvements, along with aesthetic harmony, are primary concerns.

A strict interpretation of these guidelines may be waived by the Historic District Commission if the applicant develops a design solution which meets the spirit and intent of these regulations in a better manner. In the same sense, the guidelines presented here are not fixed and immutable through time but are subject to continuing study and revision by the Historic District Commission as the desirability for such modifications becomes apparent. Application of the guidelines includes:

1. The repair, remodeling, or reconstruction of existing architecturally or historically significant structures, for which the guidelines seek to guide and encourage restoration or sympathetic rehabilitation in line with the original character of the structure.
2. The construction of new buildings or new parts of older buildings, for which the focus of the guidelines is on the compatibility of new construction with the existing character of the district in question, without dictating style or taste.

3. The demolition or removal of all or parts of existing buildings, for which the focus of the guidelines is to find feasible alternatives to the demolition of significant buildings, or parts of significant buildings.
4. In rare instances, the possible relocation of buildings to sites within a given district, for which the guidelines seek to ensure that buildings moved to sites within a given district are compatible with the surrounding buildings and are suitably situated on the lot.

The appropriateness of plans for rehabilitation and for new construction will, in general, be judged on the basis of six broad categories of criteria. These include site orientation, scale, form and modeling of the facade, roof form, materials and colors, and landscaping. In addition, criteria for evaluating the impact of demolition, signs, accessory buildings, and mechanical equipment are also included.

Site Orientation

1. Orientation of buildings on the site. To preserve the continuity prevailing along most block faces and streetscapes in a given district, the principal facade of a new building is appropriately oriented parallel to the street it faces.
2. Street-facing yards of existing buildings. In conjunction with the other efforts herein to preserve the facades of existing buildings and generally to maintain the existing character of block-faces and streetscapes, the construction of additions to existing significant buildings should be generally discouraged in yards adjoining public streets and should instead be confined to rear yards which are generally out of public view.

Scale

The relative proportion of a building to neighboring buildings, of a building to a pedestrian-observer, or of a building to its surroundings in general, is the building's scale. Scale does more to determine the visual impact of a building than does any other single aspect of architectural design. The scale of buildings in the older areas of the city is one of the most prominent aspects of the overall settings. Preserving a harmony and compatibility in scale among the buildings in a given district focuses attention

on three key dimensions: number of stories, floor elevation, and cornice height.

1. Number of stories. The number of stories should be, to the nearest half story, the average of the number of stories of the adjacent buildings within the maximum/minimum height range specified for the district.
2. Floor elevations. On new construction, the first floor elevation above the street curb, the entrance door sill elevation and the floor-to-floor elevations within the building should reflect the average of comparative elevations of the adjacent buildings, if at all possible.
3. Cornice or soffit line. Virtually every building in the Rockville Historic Districts has a horizontal cornice or soffit line on its principal street-facing facade. This line, which protrudes from the plane of the facade, marks and defines the top of the building for the pedestrian; its height is an important aspect of the scale of the building.

To help assure a continuity in scale from one building to the next, existing cornice or soffit lines should be preserved, and they should be reflected in new construction as well, without necessarily attempting to recreate an actual cornice in the area. Where appropriate, the height of these lines on new construction should be consistent with the average cornice dimensions of adjacent buildings.

If a covered porch or portico is being constructed and if also at least one adjacent building has a covered porch or portico, then the height of the cornice or soffit line of the porch or portico should also be consistent with the average height of the adjacent porch(es) or portico(s).

Form and Modeling of the Facade

Another aspect of building design that contributes significantly to the collective visual image of the Rockville Historic Districts is the treatment of the building facades. The careful design and modeling of the building surfaces with bays and turrets, oriels, covered porches, and various planes in the facade, together with a considered placement and

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proportioning of the windows, gives the typical streetscape in the Rockville Historic Districts a richness and character (detailed in the preceding series of sketches) that is quite unlike that of most contemporary buildings.

Fundamental to the achievement of this distinctive richness and character are the five aspects -- rhythm and proportion of facades, modeling of the facades, porches, fenestration patterns, and architectural details -- which are discussed below.

1. Rhythm and proportion of facades. Basic to the character of the streetscapes in the Rockville Historic Districts are the rhythm and proportion of facades along a street that an observer senses as he walks or drives by. This is experienced as an ordered recurrent alternation of building masses, and it comes from a uniformity both in the proportions of the facades along the street and in the spacing of the buildings (these aspects are detailed in a series of sketches contained in the present design guidelines). These elements should be considered in remodeling and in new construction. Along a street, such harmony is to be encouraged.
2. Modeling of the facades. Typically in the Rockville Historic Districts the basic shape or proportion of the building facade is further articulated by subdividing the flat, vertical plane of the facade into separate elements, such as protruding bays, dormers, covered porches, porticos, colonnades. Various off-sets of the facade have been used to model, or give form and depth to, the street-facing and other planes of the building. In remodeling and restoration of existing buildings, these elements should generally be preserved; in new construction, contemporary adaptations of such elements may be appropriate if handled well.
3. Porches. Of particular visual and experiential importance in existing buildings in the Rockville Historic Districts are the porches and porticos. These provide an element of uniformity that ties together the architectural diversity of the area. Moreover, they act as transitional elements of scale between the building and the sidewalk and street.

They are especially important on the large, free-standing houses by helping to subdue the impact of their scale upon the neighborhood. Not least, they are often the prominent architectural feature of many of these buildings. In remodeling and rehabilitation of existing buildings, porches and porticos should be preserved wherever possible, and removing or enclosing them, especially in ways detailed in a preceding sequence of sketches on the subject, should be discouraged. If original details are not available, reproduce in a similar representative form and material. (See pages 54, 55.)

4. Fenestration patterns. The predominant fenestration patterns of facades in the Rockville Historic Districts exhibit a certain regularity and harmony in proportion and size of window and door openings and in the rhythm and order with which they are arranged. In these terms, fenestration of new construction should be compatible with that along the streetscape. The existing pattern must be preserved in remodeling. Most common to the various Rockville districts are tall, one-over-one, two-over-two, or six-over-one double-hung windows, typically of a 1:2 to 1:3 width to height proportion (although dormer windows are sometimes 1:1). Single-pane "picture" windows, jalousie windows, glass blocks, and windows with horizontally oriented panes are not generally compatible with the existing character of the area.

Proportions of window blinds (solid panels) or shutters (slatted panels) should be consistent with the dimensions of the windows and should be applied in such a way that, even if attached permanently to the wall, they would appear as though they could be made to close properly into the window opening. Shutters must be sash length and half the sash width (see pages 50 and 51). Imitation shutters whose material or treatment is glaringly incompatible with the overall design of the house should be discouraged.

The use of storm windows has long been popular as a means of reducing winter fuel bills. More recently, the permanently-fixed aluminum type has become the most popular because it does not need to be put up and taken down in the spring and fall and at the same time doubles as an insect screen in summer. The important concern is that the storm windows used should appear to be an integral part of the house. To achieve this:

- a. The storm window should be one-over-one or single pane to reveal the inner window.
- b. The storm window frame should match the sash color.

The practice of blocking-up or blocking-down existing window openings substantially changes the basic appearance of a building and should be avoided in the remodeling or rehabilitation of existing structures. (It is often more economical to replace in kind.) If it is considered absolutely necessary to lower an interior ceiling beyond the window head, some way should be found of retaining the full exterior height of the window.

Generally, in existing buildings, the size of original openings should be retained, and doors and windows on the main facades should not be closed. (See page 48.)

5. Architectural details. Architectural details and ornamentation represent historic elements of Rockville architecture and are important components of the overall character of the respective Historic Districts in Rockville. The distinctiveness of the older buildings in the districts is directly associated with these elaborate details. Since unsympathetic changes can destroy both the individual architectural character of a building and the balance of the overall streetscape in ways that have been shown in a preceding series of sketches, significant building details should not be lost in rehabilitation or "modernization" of existing buildings. Frequently, the best solution is to repair rather than replace trim. Remodeling efforts should respect and capitalize on the original architectural integrity of the structure, and should attempt to retain such characteristic detail as (see glossary):

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| - modillioned cornices | - decorative patterned brick |
| - lattice work in windows | - fanlights and sidelights around doors |
| - keystones and voussoirs | - transom lights |
| - lintels and sills | - palladian windows |
| - flat or rounded wood or brick | - stained glass windows |
| arches above windows and doors | - rose or wheel windows |
| - stone or wood quoining | |

- wood pilasters and columns
- decorative chimney flues
- fish-scale and other decorative wood shingle siding
- compatible exterior lighting
- tile roofs
- multi-colored slate roofs
- patterned pressed tin roofs
- carved wood doors

At the same time, efforts to "early up" an existing building--that is, efforts to transform a building into a preconceived earlier period through the use of details that were not originally used on the structure--do not usually retain its architectural integrity and should be discouraged.

Roof Form

A variety of roof forms appears throughout the Rockville Historic Districts. These add appreciably to the essential character and silhouette of the buildings in these districts. Almost all can have their place in new construction without detrimental effect on the character of the area, provided they are well integrated into a design that does more than merely seek to mimic isolated favorite motifs.

1. Principal roof forms. As principal roof forms, gable, mansard, hip, and gambrel roofs (if the gable end does not face a public street) are, by themselves or in combination, predominant throughout the districts and should be continued or preserved.
2. Porches and dormers. As secondary roof forms, gable or hip roofs are common for porches, while gable or shed (pent) roofs are common for dormers.

Generally, the appropriateness of roof forms must be considered in the context of the existing roof forms on the original buildings for purposes of remodeling or on adjacent buildings for purposes of new construction.

Materials and Colors

Like architectural details, materials and colors are important components of both individual buildings and of the overall character of the larger setting.

1. Use of materials. Of the variety of building materials originally used in the Rockville Historic Districts, wood horizontal clapboarding is the most common, appearing throughout the districts on detached houses. Stucco and brick are also used and, together with wood clapboarding, represent perhaps the most appropriate building materials to be used on new construction and remodeling of existing buildings.

Wood frame houses offer a great range of choice which can be made concerning exterior materials. As a general rule, nothing is going to look better than the material for which the house was originally designed. If it is wood horizontal clapboarding, there is a strong case for retaining it or replacing it with the same material, taking care to see that the spacing of the horizontal lines, or laps, is the same as that of the original.

Vertical or diagonal board and batten, vertically or diagonally sawn wood panels, wide lap siding, rough wood shakes, and other materials not common or characteristic of the Rockville districts would probably not be judged to be compatible.

Synthetic clapboarding of aluminum or vinyl is increasingly being used for maintenance reasons because it needs no painting and is regarded as adding a layer of insulation to the house. However, it should be noted that aluminum siding can be dented and scratched easily and permanently and cannot be painted over the factory-applied color if another color is desired. There is growing evidence, moreover, that the resulting cavity between aluminum and original siding which provides a measure of insulation also acts as an air tunnel through which fire can spread over the entire house with alarming speed. Vinyl siding likewise is easily and permanently scratched and cannot be repainted. Here, too, there is emerging evidence that, in

case of fire, vinyl siding tends to give off noxious fumes that may prove as harmful as the fire itself by sometimes making it difficult for fire fighters to approach the burning building.

If synthetic clapboarding of aluminum or vinyl is to be used, several guides for its compatible use are appropriate. Above all, it must be remembered that these are imitation materials and that they should not do what the original wood clapboards could not do. They should run horizontally, for instance, and should not suddenly run vertically over a curved surface or projecting feature such as a bay, unless the siding in the original design did. Also, they should not run continuously around the corner of a building but should be trimmed by adequately wide corner boards. The spacing between horizontal lap lines should be identical to the original clapboarding and should not change arbitrarily at different wall areas unless such changes occurred in the original design. When this spacing is increased from four to nine inches (as is common in many of the new synthetic sidings), the scale of the entire house is changed, frequently for the worse. Details such as corner boards and the flat trim around windows and doors are often removed in the course of re-siding and either not replaced or replaced by thin metal equivalents that give a totally different expression to the building. Where feasible, existing important details of the facade should be retained or replaced after the new siding is installed. (A good example is at 5 N. Adams Street.)

Brick work often can be most effectively restored by washing or steam cleaning. Soft bricks can be damaged by some techniques such as sandblasting. Portland cement is to be avoided at all cost in repointing brick. It is often better to use a gray or dark tinted mortar when repointing so that the wall itself is emphasized rather than the individual bricks. The use of darker mortar is also appropriate when introducing areas or panels of new brickwork into a remodeling job, where it often helps the new work to relate better to the old by producing a similar richness of effect.

For roofs, slate shingles, including patterned and multi-colored, and the patterned pressed-tin roofing still abound in the Historic Districts, and many older Rockville houses were originally roofed with them. Surviving examples of this roofing contribute greatly to the character of the respective districts, and every effort should be made to preserve them. For example, asphalt shingles are a common, inexpensive, and reliable material. Their use, in darker colors, may be acceptable, provided the pattern and texture are compatible with the character of the overall design of the house.

On existing buildings, particularly those with extensive ornamentation, a general guide would be that nothing is going to look better than the materials in which the building was originally designed. Wood clapboarded walls, for example, lose their vibrance and character when covered by the more static forms of artificial siding. A gable once filled with fish-scale shingles, similarly, looks somehow naked once they have been removed. The removal of the supporting brackets and suspending pendants from the so-called "Rockville" bays can transform a once-expressive form into an awkward protrusion.

2. Uses of color. Existing building colors, in the Rockville Historic Districts are varied but, for the most part, compatible. The predominant colors are white clapboarding and white and light beige stucco, interspersed with earth tones and red brick. Wood trim was originally painted in subdued earth colors to blend in with the primary building color and the natural environment. The continuation of this general color harmony is encouraged. (See Exterior Decoration, Victorian Colors for Victorian Houses which is available in the City of Rockville Planning Department library.)

Several general guides are appropriate for the use of color:

- a. Do not use too many colors. The most authentic and architecturally effective color schemes usually contain a very limited number of real colors, and many of the elements such as windows, trim, roofing tiles, etc., are the neutral whites, grays, or blacks.

- b. The basic wall color is particularly important in frame houses. White (or off-white) nearly always looks appropriate on a clapboard house, but darker-toned colors can sometimes be effective as well. In the latter instances, the muted or "natural" colors such as gull-gray, gray-blue, slightly grayed yellow ochre, or variations of brick red may be appropriate. On the other hand, many of the pastel colors such as pale violets and purples, pale green, and pinks tend to look discordant and do not relate properly with the rest of the street.
- c. Avoid definite colors when choosing roofing materials which are visible. Often, the roof has not been conceived as part of the color scheme of a building, and many otherwise effective color combinations have been spoiled by the introduction of green, violet, or pink-toned asphalt shingles. Over-colorful roofs also have the undesirable effect of drawing attention away from the more important parts of the building. Neutral gray roofs, on the other hand, will allow a much wider selection of colors on the lower parts of the house. The darker tones of gray, such as charcoal, are particularly effective as a replacement for the traditional slates and combine well with almost any color.

Landscaping

The landscaping elements in the Rockville Historic Districts, together with the building masses, form continuous, cohesive enclosures along the streetscape; every effort should be made to preserve them. The concern here is for mass and continuity and not for particular types or species of vegetation.

Most yards contain mature vegetation with large trees creating a cool, shady atmosphere. Every effort should be made to retain these large trees and other mature vegetation. Under this tree cover, or canopy, street-facing yards are now and should continue to be mostly open and uncluttered. Walls or fences of any height should be discouraged in front yards. Hedges, bushes, or ornamental shrubs

may line the building foundation wall. Off-street parking areas should be thoroughly screened from public view by compatible planting or screening, as set forth in the zoning ordinance. Wrought-iron and picket fences, which graced the yards of many early Rockville houses, should be preserved and used where they survive. Chain link fences, when visible from public spaces, are inappropriate to the character of the Rockville districts unless extensively screened by landscaping such as fast growing, evergreen climbing vines. The gates should be in forms compatible with the style of the house.

Demolition

Upon receiving an application seeking approval of a demolition project, the Historic District Commission shall determine the significance of the structure to be demolished, and the extent of the public interest that might lie in its preservation. This determination should be based on the extent to which the structure contributes to the architectural and historic character of the given Historic District, and the extent to which the structure is a vital and necessary component of the collective setting.

The Historic District Commission shall review the circumstances and condition of the structure or part proposed for demolition and shall determine feasibility of preservation. If preservation is found to be physically and/or economically unfeasible, issuance of the demolition permit shall proceed upon certification by the Commission. If preservation is found to be physically and economically feasible, the Commission shall take or encourage the taking of whatever steps seem likely to lead to such preservation, either on the site on which the structure is located or on another site to which it might appropriately be moved. Within 90 days of such determination, unless means acceptable to the owner have been found to preserve the structure, the demolition permit shall be issued.

Signs

Within the size and subject matter constraints dictated by the zoning ordinance, signs should be simple and subdued. In terms of color, letter style, and overall design, they should be discreet in their advertising and legibility, and compatible

with the character of building, as well as to the environs, to which they relate. Efforts at exaggerated stylization of period signs or lettering should be discouraged.

Accessory Buildings

Accessory buildings and structures on the site should be compatible with the principal structure in terms of colors and materials, particularly if visible from the public ways.

Mechanical Equipment

Mechanical equipment visible from a public way should be installed to be unobtrusive and/or shielded from view, for example, with a suitable opaque fence. Window air-conditioning units should be placed in the least conspicuous windows possible. Placing them in openings cut out in arbitrary fashion on walls, especially those visible from a public way, are to be avoided at all cost.

Public Actions to Improve the Overall Character of Historic Districts

Public improvements have a significant impact on the character and value of the districts and, therefore, are considered extremely important. The City of Rockville has the primary responsibility to maintain and enhance the ambience of the districts.

Traffic control and street identification signs are among the most discordant public improvements. An excessive number of directional, speed, and route identification signs adds to the visual noise and clutter of what could be a very pleasant street frontage. There is a need to control the number and coordinate the location of such signs in order to maximize the positive attributes of a particular public way.

In regard to other aspects of public improvements in Historic Districts, these guidelines do not set forth a prescriptive set of requirements. It is believed that the strength of Rockville's Historic Districts rests in the diversity of the streetscape and the blending of the individual visual elements to create an ambience reflective of our historic past. It is not considered desirable to reproduce in "Williamsburg style" an authentic

Victorian streetscape. The pleasant blending of both the old and new in a balanced manner will enhance and strengthen the very fabric which makes Rockville and its Historic Districts unique among other jurisdictions. Public improvements will be further addressed in the Historic Preservation Plan.